

Washington, DC – Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D – Ore.), a member of the House International Relations Committee, today called for a committee investigation into the torture of detainees as part of the United States' foreign policy. In a letter sent today to the House of Representatives International Relations Committee Chair Henry Hyde and Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Chairman Dana Rohrabacher, Blumenauer asked that the subcommittee begin investigating this issue immediately.

"I am simply appalled by continued revelations in the media regarding the torture of detainees in American custody," Blumenauer wrote in his letter requesting the investigation. "The extensive reports of physical and mental abuse at American detention facilities around the world, the evidence of detainees being turned over to other countries to be interrogated and tortured, and continued efforts by the Bush administration to restrict legal and constitutional protections from detainees form a compelling case that these are not isolated incidents but administration policy."

To date, despite media reports of the use of torture by the United States, no Congressional Committee has looked into the breadth of these allegations.

"The extent of this scandal is far-reaching and broad," Blumenauer noted in his letter. "Torture of detainees in American custody, beyond the infamous case of Abu Ghraib, has been reported at military prisons in both Iraq and Afghanistan. FBI agents have confirmed the use of physical and psychological abuse at our detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba."

Blumenauer has served on the House International Relations Committee since 1998. In January of this year, Blumenauer selected to serve on the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. A copy of Blumenauer's letter follows.

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February 24, 2005

Dear Chairman Hyde and Chairman Rohrabacher,

I am simply appalled by continued revelations in the media regarding the torture of detainees in American custody, whether by CIA officials, military personnel, or after being transferred to foreign governments. The extensive reports of physical and mental abuse at American detention facilities around the world, the evidence of detainees being turned over to other countries to be interrogated and tortured, and continued efforts by the Bush administration to restrict legal and constitutional protections from detainees form a compelling case that these are not isolated incidents but administration policy.

The House International Relations Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, having jurisdiction over the conduct of foreign policy, has a responsibility to investigate the legal, ethical, and practical issues involved in the use of torture. I ask that our subcommittee open an investigation into the torture and rendition of detainees as elements of our foreign policy and their impact on our efforts to win hearts and minds in the war on terror.

The extent of this scandal is far-reaching and broad. Torture of detainees in American custody, beyond the infamous case of Abu Ghraib, has been reported at military prisons in both Iraq and Afghanistan. FBI agents have confirmed the use of physical and psychological abuse at our detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. And recently, in an extensive article entitled "Outsourcing Torture," The New Yorker reported on the practice of extraordinary rendition where detainees are transferred to the custody of governments which are not subject to American restrictions on abuse and are known for torture of prisoners, such as Syria, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan. The well-known case of Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen who was arrested and shipped to Syria where he was tortured, is only one example of what appears to be an oft-used technique.

I am additionally troubled by the use of a Gulfstream V jet registered to a shadowy -- and possibly illegal -- dummy front company, Bayard Foreign Marketing LLC, in my home town of Portland, Oregon. Press reports have found no public record of the company's alleged owner, nor have calls to their office been successful at locating him. The evidence certainly points to a violation of Oregon law in order to hide the true nature and breadth of this extraordinary rendition program.

The use of torture and extraordinary rendition by the United States is not only morally reprehensible, it is useless and counterproductive. Experts know that victims of torture will likely say whatever they believe their torturers want to hear. While torture may extract information, it is hardly reliable information. In fact, a policy of torture likely hinders our intelligence gathering efforts as potential sources of reliable information are turned into sources of bad and misleading information. In addition, the use of torture by Americans

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degrades the moral and legal leverage we need to prevent its use against Americans. The use of torture by this administration puts captured American military personnel at greater risk.

The United States believes in freedom, in human rights, and in due process. For many, freedom is the entire premise for our military actions in the Middle East. The unfortunate fact is that, through our actions, we open ourselves to charges of hypocrisy from the very people we need to convince of our good intentions; the United States may pretend to be different, but it too engages in inhumane practices. By making an association between our rhetoric of democracy and such profoundly horrid practices, we set back the cause of democracy through our actions.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I stand ready to work with you on this crucial issue for our subcommittee.

Sincerely,

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress